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RISING TO THE OCCASION

By EMILE GRIMSHAW

The London Banjo Club enhanced their reputation on March 5th when they appeared at a Green Room Rag concert at the Princes Theatre. Anyone familiar with concerts promoted by the Green Room Club appreciates that only proved artists are invited to take part and, in consequence, there is never a dull moment in the entire programme. The performance in question was " sold out " to a very appreciative and satisfied audience and I was anxious to see how the London Club would be received. They were to appear in the " Green Room Minstrels " towards the end of the programme and though Dr. Hussey, who had returned from Australia only two days before, and Tom Edwards warned me that the afternoon rehearsal had not gone too well I was still confident that their misgivings would be rapidly dispersed once they started playing. Apparently the players were some distance from the footlights and Tom Downing, the Club conductor, had to " officiate " from the conductor's chair in the orchestra.

However, as is well known in London, Tom Downing set an unusually high standard when the Club was re-formed and by perseverance and enthusiasm coupled with more than average individual ability they have been able to take part in several broadcast and television performances successfully. Therefore it was no surprise to find that their performance was one of the " high lights " of the Minstrel Show. Their rendering of " Swanee Sing Song " was really good and was well received by the audience. F. C. Musselbrook's contra bass banjo completed the picture.

The success of the London Banjo Club in broadcasting and stage appearances has caused members of other clubs to wonder why they too should not be able to indulge in similar activity. Putting aside any question of playing ability, which may or may not be adequate, playing in public in company with professional artists under professional conditions requires considerably more than being able to play well.

The B.B.C., for instance, are used to dealing with artists who can adapt themselves to any temporary inconvenience which may become necessary in order to obtain a correct balance of

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sound. I heard of a small banjo combination who attended an audition for the B.B.C. The leader of the ensemble was the backbone of the quintette and habitually played louder than the others who played secondary parts. This arrangement had always worked satisfactorily before because they were able to seat themselves so that each could hear what the others were doing. Unfortunately at the audition the leader being the loudest was placed furthest from the microphone and the others were stretched out in a line between him and the " mike." The unusual seating arrangement spread dismay, nerves, and all the things that prevent one playing naturally and the audition failed. If each had been less dependent on the leader and each other and more capable of playing his own part accurately the unusual placing of the players would have had little effect.

At a recording of " Up The Pole " the other day Claude Dampier lost his place in the script. As he continued his impromptu version no one in the audience realised anything was amiss until Ben Warris, who was supposed to carry on the conversation realised that Claude's impromptu remarks would not lead on to his own script, suddenly said that it wouldn't be a bad idea if they got back to the script. Loud laughter followed but Jimmy Jewell added to the mirth when he remarked that in his opinion they had never been on the script. Nevertheless, that there was no embarrassment and no " drying up " of the performance was due entirely to the experience and ability of the artists to gloss over any unforeseen happenings.

A Club conductor was about to start a number at a crowded public performance when a nearby player's music dropped from his stand. The conductor, who was equally surprised, quickly turned to the microphone and told the audience that he bribed the player with a packet of cigarettes to do this at every performance so that he, the conductor, would have the opportunity of telling the audience a " story he had just heard." The story was a long-winded affair that gave the player ample time to re-arrange his music and recover his composure.

Such instances of being able to " rise to the occasion " are invaluable and are frequently the difference between the performance being a " flop " and a success.

Because the members of the London Club were so well rehearsed and confident of their individual ability the fact that they were unable to see their conductor, blinded as they were by the footlights and floodlights, made no noticeable difference to their performance. In addition to their own number, " Swanee Sing Song," the Club joined with the theatre orchestra in several popular tunes featured by " de entire company " taking their " beat " from the orchestra conductor. While many club members would be prepared to have a go, inexperienced players would be foolish to join lightheartedly with a theatre orchestra in a number unless they were prepared to watch and understand the conductor. This simple but necessary condition is not one of the strong points in some B.M.G. clubs even when the conductor is worth watching.

Mentioning the need for watching the conductor reminds me of an occasion at the Albert Hall when Louis Levy had an orchestra of about a hundred players on the stage in front of the organ. In the body of the Hall were the massed bands of the Guards, a Marine band, and the Royal Air Force Band. Each band had its own conductor who in turn watched a " master " conductor. This arrangement was adopted to ensure synchronal playing from the large number of musicians, well over three hundred, who occupied the entire floor space and stage. The music to be played was " Land of Hope and Glory." The organist, who was sitting with his back to the auditorium, watched Louis Levy through a mirror. Of course it was impossible for any player to form the slightest idea of the total effect but it was tremendously impressive. After the first run through a peculiar silence ensued only to be broken by a still more unbelievable request to the organist through a loud speaker " do you mind keeping it down a bit old boy, you're drowning the lot."

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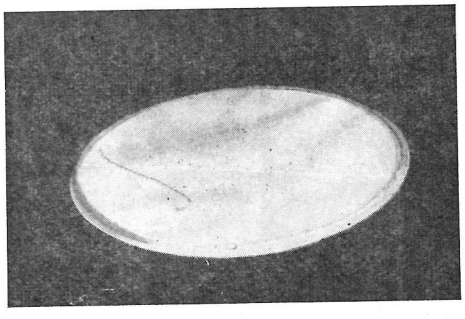

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FEDERATION FACTITUDE

By W. Turland Hill

It is some time since I contributed an article under this heading to "Pickings" and consequently in taking up my pen again I have been tempted to ask myself "What has the Federation done since I last wrote?"

The answer is not to be found in any particular "stunt" or spectacular achievement but an examination of the record shows that we are achieving slowly but surely what we set out to do.

One correspondent wrote to one of the Executive Delegates and said that "There is a revived and growing interest in our instruments." The truth of this statement cannot be disputed and the Federation can take a large measure of the credit. Of course the organisation has been criticised but most of this criticism comes from malicious and uninformed people. Nevertheless, some of the criticism is justifiable and therefore accepted by your committee. In my opinion the most justifiable criticism made is by isolated players and groups of players residing far from the centres of activity of either the Northern and Southern Sections. A cursory glance at a map will show that the Federation influence and greatest player density (with some notable exceptions), is to be found in areas within a radius of 50 miles or so from the centres of activity of the Northern and Southern Sections. The obvious conclusion to be drawn from this fact is that in practice 50 miles is probably the maximum distance players are able to travel and that if the Federation is to appeal to all players and provide them with an equal service whatever the location other foci must be found and the areas surrounding them developed. In other words there is a definite limit to the extent that players can come to the Federation and in recognising this the Federation has decided to go out to the players.

A tentative scheme has been drawn up which has been very favourably received by the Executive Committee in the South and was presented to the North for approval at their A.G.M.

Southern Section members will get their chance to approve the scheme at the next A.G.M. Broadly the scheme consists of complete regionalisation of the organisation; each region will have its own regional council and Headquarters.

Each region will be responsible for its own domestic affairs within the broad framework of policy decided by the Central Council. The members of the Central Council will be nominated by regional councils but voting will be by card vote in each region so that each member will play his or her part directly in electing national representatives.

The Central Council will be responsible for arranging and carrying out functions on a national basis. Regions will be encouraged and helped to run their own Festivals and other functions. A special branch of the organisation will be set up to cater for the isolated and lone player, so that in effect he will cease to be isolated but will simultaneously have every opportunity to develop his individual tastes.

Full details will be circulated to members in due course.

Federation Bulletin

Another criticism levelled at the Federation, perhaps, not unjustifiably is that its publicity is inadequate. We are grateful for all the space given to us in commercial journals but this apparently is not in itself regarded by many members as sufficient, in consequence we are issuing a "Federation Bulletin" directly to all members.

No. 1 appeared at the latter end of last year and was very well received; No. 2 was published in March and the next issue will no doubt be to hand by the time you read these notes.

"Get Together"

The Southern Section presented a very successful "Get Together" at Wornington Road School, North Kensington, with the Western District Club acting as hosts. During the evening members and friends heard a representative performance by soloists, small combinations, clubs and for good measure some excellent massed band playing. The clubs taking part included Fulham "Beaufort," Gloucester, Hackney, North London, Romford, Watford and, of course, the host club, Western District. Representatives of many other clubs, including Birmingham, Croydon, London, Lewisham and Tunbridge Wells, were also present.

Plectrum and Electric Guitarists

It has been suggested that the Federation should sponsor an exclusive "Get Together" for players of these instruments. We know there is a large demand for such an evening and in consequence such an evening will be arranged at the first convenient opportunity.

It is proposed, among other things to present a first-class exponent of the instruments. All members and other players of the instruments are invited to attend and details will be forwarded as soon as available to all enquiring to the Hon. Secretary (Mr. G. Sagrott, 7, Colne Road, Clapton, E.5). (Please enclose a stamped addressed envelope.) You can also help by sending us answers to the following questions:—

(a) Whom would you like to hear as a guest artist?

(b) What are your ideas on the way in which such an evening should be conducted?

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PARS ABOUT PLAYERS

The advantages of having a reserve instrument were appreciated by the Five Smith Brothers recently as they were leaving the stage at the end of their performance at the Brixton Empress theatre in London. Their Grimshaw G.6 Guitar was damaged badly when another artist accidentally knocked the instrument from the guitarist's hand. A new body was fitted and a second "blonde" G.6 has been supplied as a reserve instrument.

In order to make the recordings for their "Up the Pole" broadcasts at the Aeolian Hall, Bond Street, each Sunday, they frequently had to travel four or five hundred miles on the same day. One recent trip was from Blackpool to Bond Street and immediately after the show return north to Huddersfield. Two weeks after, Halifax, Bond St., Newcastle was the itinerary.

The Five Smith Brothers were recently entertained by the Cunard-White Star on the occasion of the return to Newfoundland on the "Franconia" of the "Two Smith Brothers" who, it will be recalled, sailed the Atlantic in their small dinghy last year.

Wally Baron, pre-war banjo and guitar teacher in Hornsey, London, is rapidly earning the reputation as the Great British Fretted Instrument Pioneer who is blazing a trail across Africa converting all and sundry to Banjos and Guitars. "Big Chief Wally" emigrated to Port Elizabeth in 1939 and has since travelled via Johhannesburg some two thousand miles northwards into Southern Rhodesia where he is now organising a teaching connection and fretted instrument club at Bulawayo.

Len Goldsmith, guitarist in the Polish Club orchestra, Kensington, London, says he wonders why he bothered to play an "acoustic only" guitar for so long. Len says his G.3 "Electracoustic" gives him a feeling of importance and enables him to take a more interesting part in the band.

A new march has been composed and arranged for the Romford B.M.G. Club by "Colin Wood." W. Turland Hill, the Club's conductor resides in Colinwood Avenue. Maybe we can't see the hill for the wood.

"Mike" Ronga nearly "severed" his connection with his mandolin recently when a metal cutting guillotine caught his right hand. Fortunately he was able to appear the same night at the Byron Davies Presentation Concert.

Players in the North Eastern Counties should contact Mr. George Watts, 17, Osborne Road, Linthorpe, Middlesborough, for particulars of membership and details of the new North East Region of the Federation.

Mr. Joe Buchan was the sole entrant for the Balalaika Challenge Cup at the recent Festival. Dr. Boris Perrott as the adjudicator, decided that 80 marks should be the minimum for the competitor to earn for him to be considered as the winner. Buchan was in fact playing against "bogey" and with his competent performance fully deserved his success.

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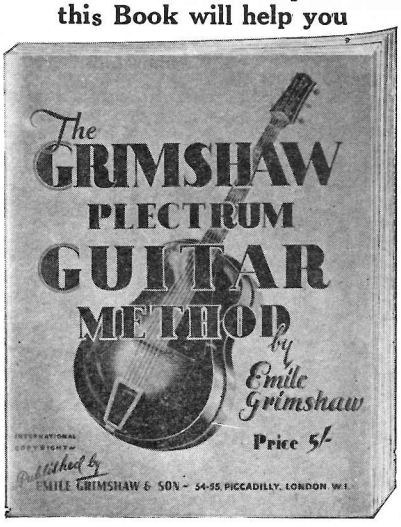

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RALLY REFLECTIONS

Mr. H. Bryant "brightened" the proceedings during the Emile Grimshaw Cup for solo banjo playing by playing "Fun in Dahomey" on his perspex banjo. This instrument was fitted with red and white electric lamps under the vellum and inside the neck. Though he did not win the contest he is to be congratulated on demonstrating his ability as a maker and a player. Mr. H. Lancaster, Newcastle-under-Lyme, with his excellent rendition of "Overture Medley" was awarded first place closely followed by Miss Joan Poucher, of Bournemouth, who played "Rachmaninoff's Prelude." Miss Poucher, however, gave an even better performance of solo banjo playing in a later contest and won the event with her rendering of "Orpheus in the Underworld."

The Grimshaw Guitar Trophy for the best "Swing" rendition of a popular tune was awarded by Ivor Mairants to P. E. Hubbard who played "Embraceable You." E. Ellix gained second place with his version of "I'll See You In My Dreams."

E. Postles, of Sale, Cheshire, won the Classical Guitar contest followed by Alan Hinks and David Kilby, both of whom reside in Luton.

It is interesting to note that of the fifteen contests, eleven were won by provincial competitors and of the forty-four competitors who were awarded the first, second and third places only fourteen resided in the London area. Although there were sixty-seven provincial entries for the competitions against fifty-nine from London the results suggest that the standard of playing generally is lower in and around London.

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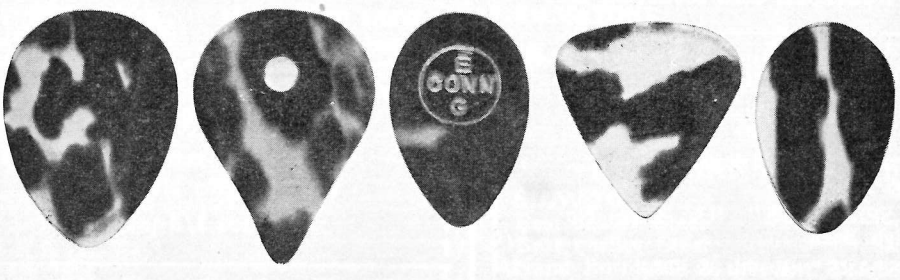

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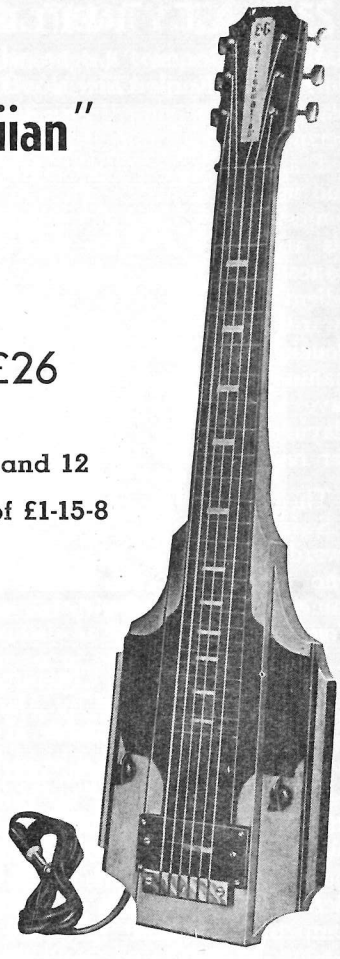

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ABBOTT-VICTOR, "Burlington," sunburst maple back, sides and neck, recently completely repolished by us. The list price of this instrument is £75, our price including case £40 0 0

EPIPHONE "Zenith," in very good condition, carved front and back, complete with case ... £18 0 0

EPIPHONE "Masterbilt," f hole, fitted "new century" pick-up unit, volume control on fingerplate, good condition, with case £15 0 0

GRIMSHAW "Revelation" f hole model, front and back sunburst, in good condition, with case ... £15 0 0

EPIPHONE "Olympic" f hole in very good condition, with case £13 0 0

HARTFORD f model, good condition, in case £12 0 0

RADIOTONE f hole model with case £9 0 0

HARTFORD 5" round sound model, fitted vibrato unit, with case £8 0 0

MICHIGAN "Valencia" round sound hole, sunburst model ... £6 6 0

ALL THE ABOVE INSTRUMENTS were taken in part exchange for our new "Electracoustic" guitars and are in satisfactory playing condition. Our stock is constantly changing and we will gladly send our latest list on request.

Any Instrument New or Used, advertised in "PICKINGS" at £15 or more can be obtained by hire purchase. While we are always prepared to suggest a ratio of deposit and payments we are pleased to consider any different arrangement regarding method of payment our customers may wish to propose.

Players who are interested in Exchanging their Instruments and would like us to quote an allowance, should give the following details—

(*a*) The make and model of your instrument and the instrument that interests you. (*b*) The list price of your instrument if bought new. (*c*) The condition of the neck and body, whether warped or cracked. (*d*) Appearance and condition of the polish. (*e*) Condition of the case.

We should then be able to form an accurate idea of your instrument and give an appropriate quotation.

EMILE GRIMSHAW & SON, 54-55 Piccadilly, London, W.1. Phone **Regent 6977**

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